QUICK & FUN POETRY GAMES

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Grammar Games

Inspired by Games to Improve Your Child’s English, by Hurwitz and Goddard; Creative Cornering by Forte, Pangle and Tupa; Language Games by Wagner, Hosier, and Blackman

Here are more fun games to help improve your students’ grammar, spelling, and knowledge of the English language. Some of the games may seem difficult, but they can be adapted to make them easier.

Alphabet Adjectives

To work with adjectives and improve vocabulary

Students must describe themselves or an object, using a series of adjectives beginning with the letters of the alphabet (e.g., My dog is aggressive, beautiful, cunning, and dark colored, etc.). If they cannot think of a word for a letter, have them skip the letter and keep going! The student who can use the most letters of the alphabet wins.

Alphabet Adverbs with Charades

To work with adverbs and vocabulary

Begin with a sentence that can be completed with an adverb and have students add adverbs following the alphabet. (e.g., “The girl kicked the soccer ball _______ _______ aggressively, badly, courteously, etc.”). If they cannot think of a word for a letter, have them skip that letter and keep going! While they add their words, they can also act out the actions.

Alphabet Categories

To improve vocabulary and creative thinking

Choose a category that the students must follow (e.g., The category is animals: aardvark, baboon, cat, deer). If they can’t think of a word for a letter, have them skip it and keep going!

Alphabet Nouns

To work with nouns and improve vocabulary

This game is similar to Alphabet Adjectives but uses nouns instead (e.g., “My frog likes _______ _______”). Have students take turns filling in the blank following the alphabet sequence (e.g., My frog likes apples and bananas and cats…). If they cannot think of a word for a letter, have them skip that letter and keep going!

Alternative Sentences:

To help students build creative sentences

The goal is to create a long sentence with words that all begin with the same letter. You can go around in a circle and have each student add a word, or see which student can make the longest sentence with his/her letter (e.g., Barbie basks beautifully by Bill’s beach house).

Balderdash

To improve vocabulary and creative thinking

Either play using the board game or grab a dictionary and choose several difficult words. For each word, have each student make up a definition and write it on a sheet of paper. The teacher writes the true definition on a sheet of paper. Collect all of the sheets and read all of the definitions out loud including the true definition. The goal of the game is for the students to pick the correct definition of the word.

Beat the Clock

To understand sequence in a paragraph

Write paragraphs on pieces of paper, one sentence per strip. Place the strips in envelopes (one paragraph per envelope) and have each player choose an envelope. Set a timer. When you say go, have students arrange their paragraphs in the correct sequence. The first player to finish is the winner.

Ghost

To improve spelling and vocabulary

The first player thinks of a word but says only the first letter. The second player then adds a second letter, spelling a word. Each succeeding player must add a letter to the forming word with a word in mind. If someone cannot add a letter or does not think a real word is being formed he/she can challenge the prior student. Every time a student finishes a word, feels challenged and cannot think of a word, or cannot add a letter, he/she receives a G-H-O-S-T (one letter for every miss). Once a player spells out G-H-O-S-T, he/she becomes a ghost and no one can speak to him/her. If
another player speaks to a ghost, he/she automatically becomes a ghost as well. The winner is the last survivor.

Ex. Student 1, thinking of "note", says "N." Student 2, thinking of nose, says "O." Student 3, thinking of note, says "I." Student four cannot think of a letter to add, so he is out (Remind your students that they must be thinking of real words!)

Gram-O
To review the parts of speech

Create a GRAM-O card for each student. They are similar to BINGO cards but have GRAM-O at the top and parts of speech instead of numbers. You can use adverbs, adjectives, nouns, verbs, proper nouns, etc. Prepare slips of paper with words that represent each part of speech. If the student places a marker down he/she must write the word on the marker before placing it on the card (e.g., A-Little the student could place a marker on adjective under the letter A after writing little on his/her marker). Otherwise played just like BINGO.

Grab Bag
To help students learn about correct punctuation

On pieces of paper, write sentences leaving out the correct punctuation. On the back, write the same sentence correctly punctuated. Place all of the pieces into a box or bag. Divide students into groups of four and give each group a bag/box of sentences. The first player picks a strip from the bag/box and corrects the punctuation. If he/she is correct, he/she gets to keep the strip. If he/she is wrong, the strip goes into the bag and it is the next player’s turn. The winner is the student with the most strips of paper (the greatest number of correctly punctuated sentences).

Grammar ABC’s
To humorously review parts of speech

Prepare two decks of 52 cards: 9 E’s, 7 A’s, 7 I’s, 8 O’s, 8 U’s and Y’s, and 3 of each consonant. Shuffle the deck and place it in the middle of a circle of students.

PART 1
Adjectives

The first player says to the second, “I have a message from a friend of yours.” Player 2 says, “From whom?” Player 1 draws a card from the deck (say a U) and answers, “I don’t remember his name but he has an unusual face.” Continue around the circle with each student drawing a card and describing the friend using an adjective beginning with the letter drawn. If he/she thinks of a word, he/she keeps the letter; if he/she cannot, the letter is passed to the next person.

PART 2
Nouns

When it is player 1’s turn, he/she continues with “your friend brought a ___________ with him.” Player 1 fills in the blank with a noun starting with a new letter he drew from the pile (not the original one). Continue play as in the first round but with nouns.

PART 3
Adverbs

When player 1’s turn comes up again, he/she will say, “Your friend was dressed ______________.” and fill in the blank with an adverb. Continue play as in round one and two but with adverbs.

PART 4
Verbs

This round player 1 begins with, “Your friend ______ when he came.” and fills in the blank with a verb. Continue play as in previous rounds. The student who winds up with the most cards wins the game.

Parts of Speech Game
To help students learn the parts of speech

Hand out several note cards to every student and have them write as many nouns, verbs and adjectives as they can think of, one per card. They must write neatly so everyone can read the cards. Stack the cards in the front of the room, creating noun, verb and adjective piles. Have one student pick a card from the noun pile and have all the students become a statue of that noun (e.g., rabbit). But, the rabbit has to be doing something, so have the student pick a card from the verb pile (e.g., kicked). So, how did the rabbit kick? Have the student draw a card from the adjective pile to get the final action. Let the students act out the description for a little bit and then start all over. Turn some of the funny descriptions into stories.

Period Puzzlers
To help students identify complete sentences

Mount pictures on poster board, and cut the pictures
into ten to fifteen pieces creating one puzzle for each student. On the back of each puzzle piece, write either a phrase or a complete sentence. Pair the kids up to play against each other and give each a puzzle. Have the students scramble the puzzle and put the pieces in a pile (one pile per puzzle). The first player draws a puzzle piece and reads the phrase or sentence on the back. If he/she correctly identifies it as either a complete sentence or a phrase, he/she then keeps the piece and it is the other player’s turn. If he/she doesn’t correctly identify it, then the piece goes back into the pile. The first player to complete his/her puzzle wins.

**Quotation Quandary**

*To learn to use quotation marks correctly*

Write sentences that need quotation marks on strips of paper, leaving out the correct punctuation. On the back of the paper, write the sentence again, punctuated correctly. On small squares of paper, make quotation marks. Divide the class into groups of 2-3 students and give each group several sentences and quotation marks. Each group will play a separate game by having each student draw a sentence strip and quotation mark cards. When you say go, all the students try to punctuate their sentence correctly. The winners are the first students to punctuate their sentences correctly (have students check their answers by flipping the strip over).

**Scrambled Sentence**

*To punctuate sentences and place them in proper order*

Select a saying, quotation or proverb and write it on several cards, one word per card. Make a duplicate set for each team of students. Hand a set to each group and see who can put the sentence together in its original order the fastest.

**Sense Charts**

*To sharpen powers of observation and develop original writing and vocabulary*

Have students choose a topic that can be described in terms of senses. Tell your students to fill their minds with that topic and turn their minds into cameras taking pictures. Write everything they saw under a SIGHT column on the board. When the space is full, move on to SOUNDS, writing down everything they heard. Do the same with TOUCH, SMELL and TASTE. Admire all the vocabulary and ideas your students just envisioned that can be used for a story.

**Sentence Treasure Hunt**

*To actively work on sentence structure*

Take a quotation, nursery rhyme or poem. Put it on pieces of paper, one word per piece, and hide the words throughout the room before the students arrive. Begin the day by sending them out on a treasure hunt. Tell them how many words they are looking for and to bring a notebook on their search. If they find a word, tell them to leave it but write the word down on their paper. Once they have gathered all the words, have them sit down and try to put together the words into the original phrase.

**Spelling Grab Bag**

*To work on frequently misspelled words*

Prepare a set of cards with a phonetic respelling of an ordinary word. Throw the cards into a box and have each player draw a card, pronounce the word, and spell it correctly. The game can be run like a spelling bee. Possible words to use are: ruf (tough), kwik (quick), sed (said), vu (view).

**Story Order**

*To teach students the importance of a logical flow in a story*

Choose a story with which the students are not familiar. Divide it into three parts (beginning, middle, end). On small strips of paper, divide each of those parts into sentences or paragraphs that can later be put together in the correct order. Place each section of the story in an envelope and pass out one envelope to each group of 5 students. Give each group 10 minutes to put its section in the correct order and decide if it is the beginning, middle, or end of the story. Regroup and have the whole class act out the story.

**Synonym Game**

*To improve vocabulary and expand writing*

Divide the students into 2-4 teams and equip each team with a paper and pen. Give the students a word and tell them they will have 1 minute to come up with as many synonyms for that word as possible. Use basic words like...
said, ran, went, etc. Give each original word two points and words used more than once one point. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

**Verb Charades**

*To learn different verbs and use creative expression*

Create cards with verbs written on them, one per card. Choose creative verbs that will improve students’ vocabulary and also can be acted out. Form teams and play like charades, handing a card to one student and letting the rest of the team guess the verb. Good verb choices are: shrug, flutter, shave, snip, flinch, steal, guzzle, etc.

**What Did You See?**

*To sharpen powers of observation and make students comfortable with writing*

Take two minutes and have your students write everything they observe in the classroom. When time is up, have everyone share their lists. Do not critique, simply comment on how unique everyone’s observations were.

**Word Ladders**

*To sharpen powers of observation and improve spelling*

The goal is to change one word into another step by step with the fewest steps possible. Each time you can change only one letter in the word, each change counts as one step (e.g., Change WET to DRY: WET—MET—MAT—MAY—DAY—DRY). Good combinations to use are:

- **MAN** to **BOY**
- **FISH** to **CLAM**
- **HIM** to **HER**
- **POT** to **PAN**
- **WOOD** to **COAL**
- **LOVE** to **HATE**
- **FOAL** to **COLT**
- **SEEK** to **FIND**
- **FIND** to **LOSE**
- **WARM** to **COLD**
Performance Exercises

The purpose of these activities is to give students a fun, yet practical, introduction to the basic elements of performance. These activities will stimulate your poets' imagination and sense of humor!

Tongue Twisters
Help kids develop articulation skills. Examples:

She sells seashells by the seashore.

Round and round the rugged rocks the ragged rascal ran.

Betty Botta bought a bit of butter and put it in her batter. "But," said she, "this batter's bitter. Perhaps the butter's bitter." So Betty Botta bought a bit of better butter and put it in her bitter batter which made her bitter batter a bit better.

Thissian Thistle, the successful thistle sitter, sifts sieves full of three thousand thistles through the thick of his thumb.

Pitch and Phrasing
Help kids develop vocal expressiveness.

Getting Into Character!
Directions: Write the poem below on the board, then have poets pair up. Have them take turns reading the poem in different voices. They should choose from the list below. Model an example before settling your students to the task. Poem:

Where My Clothes Are
Dirty clothes should be put in the hamper.
Clean clothing belongs in the drawer.
But it takes too much time and it takes too much work—so I throw them all over the floor.

Voices
1. Their own mother, father or grandparent.
2. With a teacher's voice.
3. With a really sassy voice.
4. With a coach's voice
5. With a really bored voice.
6. With a toddler's voice.
7. With a cheerful voice.
8. With a scientist's voice.
9. With an artist's voice.
10. With a police officer's voice.
11. With an opera singer's voice.

Say It As If...
Have poets read the following statement:

I notice people staring at me everywhere I go.

Then try saying it in different ways. Say the sentence as if...

A. You're mad that people are staring at you.
B. You're sad that people are staring at you.
C. You're happy that people are staring at you.
D. You're nervous or anxious that people are staring at you.
E. You're embarrassed that people are staring at you.
F. You're surprised that people are staring at you.
G. You're suspicious of people that are staring at you.
H. You're tired of people staring at you.

Imagination
Help kids express their imaginations.

Have poets create a number of imaginary situations that involve role-playing. Follow up with questions to help poets clarify the details of each situation. Sample scenarios:

• Walking a tightrope. How high up are you? Is there a
safety net? Is this your first time on a tightrope or are you a seasoned professional? Are you afraid? How narrow is the rope? How easy is it to keep your balance?

- **Walking through tall grass.** How tall is the grass? How thick is it? Is it wet or dry? Are there animals in the grass? Are you trying to find someone? Are you trying to escape from someone?

- **Walking through mud.** Is the mud warm or cold? How deep is it? Do you have shoes on? Are you enjoying walking in the mud? Do you want to get out as fast as you can?

Have poets play imaginary group games (catch, Frisbee, soccer, baseball) to help teach non-verbal communication. Good questions to ask include: Does everyone know who has the ball? Is everyone playing with the same size ball? When the ball is thrown or hit, does everyone know what direction and speed the ball is going?

**Concentration**

Help poets focus their energy during a performance.

- Pair poets together and explain that they must move as if they were mirroring each other’s actions. The goal is to make it impossible for an outsider to pick out a ‘follower’ and a ‘leader’.

- Give one poet a simple arithmetic problem to solve in his/her head (or have them make a paper airplane) while the rest of the class tries to distract the person without using physical force.

**Observation**

Help poets see and remember specific details about people and situations.

- Pair them up and give them ten seconds to observe each other. Then have them face away from each other and answer several questions about one another.

- Ask your poets to duplicate your posture as accurately as possible as you move poets body into various positions. Start with simple moves and gradually make each pose more complicated, forcing them to look for the details.

**Improvisation**

Help your class develop concentration and self-confidence, imagination and communication the skills.

**Situations:** Have poets improvise brief scenes such as getting lost in the woods, losing or winning a soccer game, taking care of unruly children, finding a lost dog.

**Conflict:** Have poets improvise scenes based on a central conflict. Choose from the following situations to help develop imagination and enhance problem-solving skills:

- A sneaky pirate and a nice but absent-minded fairy godmother each want the other to sit in a chair that turns bad people good and good people bad. Although both know the powers of the chair, they pretend to the other that they don’t.

- Two professional braggart explorers who have found their way into the jungle want to go home. However, neither knows the way and doesn’t want to admit to the other that they are lost.

**Bust-a-move telephone game**

- Create a standing circle with everyone facing inward, heads down and eyes closed.

- One person needs to volunteer to be the first caller. They start the game by tapping the person to the right of them on the shoulder and showing them their “signature dance move.”

- The observer repeats the dance move back to the first caller and continues the game by tapping the shoulder of the person to their right and repeating the process.

- All poets eyes stay closed EXCEPT for when it is their turn to observe or dance.

The game ends with the final caller tapping the shoulder of the first caller and showing them the final version of the dance move.
Vocal Exercises

Inspired by Make Your Voice Heard: An Actor’s Guide to Increased Dramatic Range through Vocal Training, by Chuck Jones

Coaching Tip: Vocal warm-ups work great in a circle or with poets moving through the space.

**Body Alignment**

Exercises to relax the major muscles that support the voice.

**Neck Release:** Imagine that your head is being held up by a string attached to the ceiling. Someone cuts the string and your head flops forward. Practice this motion a few times until you feel the release in the back of your neck.

**Curling Over:** Drop your head forward as if the string was cut and begin to curl your body over, letting your chest and shoulders roll over with your arms dangling in front. Let your knees bend and continue to roll down until your hands brush the floor. Release all of your tension as you hang there and let your head bob. Now, hit the rewind button and slowly start rolling back up beginning with the base of your spine. Roll all the way up with your head coming up last. Repeat several times.

**The Vocal Passage**

Exercises that concentrate on the critical voice production area: the throat, tongue, jaw and neck.

**Big Yawn:** Practice two yawns, a big yawn with your mouth wide open (as big as possible without your jaw moving forward) and a yawn with your mouth shut (like when you have to yawn in class and the teacher is looking right at you). Do these several times to stretch your mouth.

**Whispered Keh:** Breathe out the “Keh” sound. Now put your palate and tongue together (like when you say the “ng” sound in “fling”) and every time you breathe in or out, try to make the “Keh” sound.

**Ngah Ngah Sound:** Make an “ng” sound (like before) and then make an “ah” sound. Now put them together to create the “Ngah” sound. For an extra challenge, relax your tongue and put it on your lower lip while you practice the “Ngah” sound.

**Tongue Relaxation:** Put the tip of your tongue on your lower lip and think about relaxing your tongue. Without forming a word, let out the sound “Huh” without moving your tongue at all. Practice until your tongue starts feeling thick and heavy.

**Connecting Voice and Breath**

Sound carried on the breath is the most useful for helping your voice to carry. These exercises help you feel the connection with voice and breath.

**Centering:** Lie on the floor on your back with your knees bent. Place one hand on your belly and release any tension in your muscles. Now, think of your breath traveling to your lower belly. Let the air just go in and out with as little effort as possible. Now sit up and cross your legs in a comfortable position. Place your hand on your belly again and let your breath drop in to your belly and escape again. Then try it one more time standing up.

**Sound Vibration:** Think of what it would look like if sound actually came from deep down inside your belly. Imagine the breath going down into your belly and then sound coming back out with the “Huh” sound. You can do this lying down, sitting or standing up (like the previous exercise).

**The Chambers**

Exercises that warm-up the vocal chords to help increase sound.

**The Chest:** Lift your head up a little bit (about 2 inches), and let your mouth drop open like you fell asleep. Make an “Ahhhh” sound. Place your hand on your chest and feel the vibrations. Try to let your voice drop lower and lower into your chest. See how low you can go!

**The Nose:** Wrinkle up your nose and send a “Ne-Ne” sound right through your nose. Try to create the sound while keeping your neck and tongue completely relaxed.

**Freeing Your Voice**

These exercises let you allow the sound to go wherever you want.
Knees Please: Begin standing relaxed and bend your knees a bit. Now straighten them and bounce a little, going gently up and down. Let out a Hah sound as you bounce. As your body relaxes, your voice should bounce up and down as well.

Call and Response Tongue Twisters: Great for warming up the voice, body and mind.

   Whether the weather is cold
   Whether the weather is hot
   We’ll be together whatever the weather
   Whether we like it or not!

What a To-Do: Create an expressive movement for each of the lines and have students repeat it back to you, with the movement.

   What a to-do to die today at a minute or two til two
   A distinctly difficult thing to say but harder still to do
   For they’ll beat a tattoo
   at a twenty to two

   with a Rat-ta-ta, tat-ta-ta, tat-ta-ta too
   And the dragon will come
   when he hears the drum
   At a minute or two til two today
   at a minute or two to two

Shay Shay Koo-Lay (Call & Response with move-ment): Create a dance/expressive movement for each of the lines and have them model it back to you throughout the call and response—Don’t be afraid to GO BIG!

   Shay shay koo-lay
   Shay shay koe fee-sah
   A-la, key la-la
   Eye- hen-day

Quick Tongue Twisters:

   Pick a little, talk a little
   Pick a little, talk a little
   Cheep, Cheep, Cheep,
   Talk a lot, pick a little more

   The lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue
   The tip of the tongue, the teeth the lips

   Red leather, yellow leather
   Red leather, yellow leather
   Red leather, yellow leather
   Red leather, yellow leather

   I know a gnome named Norm
   I knew a gnome named Norm
   I have known a gnome named Norm